

THE COMPUTER AND CONTROL

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The computer has proved to be a valuable aid to management. The speed at which the computer can function is one of its greatest attributes. Today's computers can be programmed to store, transfer, retrieve information, do mathematical calculations and print out an answer.

Computers come in all shapes, sizes and abilities as do managers. One difference between them is that computers can be readily changed to fit the job but managers cannot. Input and output data can be changed along with varying memory capacities to mold the computer into the form you need.

A computer can add to a business by reducing the manpower doing menial jobs ranging from watching a machine to bookkeeping. Output from a computer system can largely be accepted, provided the programs have been rigorously tested and subjected to certain overall controls and computer self-checking features. This reduces the chance of human error.

A computer looks at a business as a whole not as individual companies for each department. What is best for the business is stressed rather than what is best for the department.

A well designed computer program can collect all of the necessary data and present the manager with a condensed informative output. It can handle information which had previously been uneconomical to acquire.

Caution must be observed however for a computer output is only as good as its programming and inputs. History of the business which only certain people may know is necessary for data analysis. Due to human nature which is resistant to change this historical data may be withheld just to prove the computer inadequate.

Vulnerability of the business is another concern. It is possible to make the operations of a business highly dependent on a computer. If for some reason inside or outside the computer system there is a failure whether temporary or not, the existence of a business could be jeopardized. One example is a strike because the computer could not print out the payroll checks.

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Computers do not have personalities to know when someone is changing their programming. If they are not protected, someone could tamper with a computer to make it work in their benefit rather than the company's. The computer will do what it is told to whether it is right or wrong.

Data output is useless unless it is examined and understood. A combination manager-technician is needed who can understand both the computer system and the business.

The faster a manager receives information pertaining to some area of the business that is not functioning properly, the more rapidly he can move to correct this problem and put productivity back in line with prescribed company standards.

The primary and fundamental advantage of using data processing systems is the speed with which information can be obtained and interpreted to aid in the decision making functions of a manager. The cost of the data provided must be weighed against the value of the use to be made of the data. Many firms have found the computer costs have surpassed the economics of less sophisticated and prestigious data collecting or computation methods. The manager should seek a guaranteed operational time, cost and productivity before committing the firm's resources to the computer.